***I chose to look at Sir Gawain and the Green Knight because I felt the supernatural aspects would be interesting and would lend themselves to a paper I could write five pages on. I wanted to begin by introducing the text and my paper topics. It is important that you inform the reader of what you will be doing in the paper so that their expectations can properly calibrate. It is also important to mention the secondary source(s) that will be used and potentially how this other voice will function in your paper. In my case, I used a secondary source that I could disagree with—which is usually more fun.***

Looking at the poem Sir *Gawain and the Green Knight* it becomes immediately apparent that the world these characters inhabit is one of fantasy and the supernatural. In this particular tale, the legacy of Camelot can be traced back to ancient Troy; giving Arthur’s court an even more larger than life and epic veneer. The major characters are fantastic swordsmen, giant green tricksters, or devious women; all of which (save for the giant green trickster) can be considered archetypes of fantasy literature. This being said, there is a tendency with literature, not to mention art in general, to overanalyze texts leaving them a scorched shadow of their former selves by the time scholars are through with them. However, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* should most definitely be read for pleasure first and foremost for within its pages, one can find many familiar entertainments to enjoy. We will take a look at a few scholarly ideas about this text and then contrast those with the concept of this text being a fantasy adventure, purely, and without all of this stuffy analysis.

***I began my evidence paragraphs speaking about my secondary source. It made sense in this case because I wanted to spend the majority of the paper arguing against this source. This isn’t always going to be the case as you might place your secondary source in an entirely different spot in your paper (see the blackboard link on my Wiki page for more details on this). Bear in mind that I don’t have these things structured out at all when I begin. It is usually only when I am about 2/3 of the way there that I start to move things around and reorganize my writing. You don’t have to create your final product the first time through. Just write and edit afterwards. That is the natural process.***

In Richard Moll’s humorously titled essay *Frustrated Readers and Conventional Decapitation in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* he goes on about different readers taking into account all of these ideas and concepts that can change the way the poem is read. He briefly looks at the Third Act scenes at Lord Bertilak’s castle: “Are the games of exchange Christmas interludes, or tests of character? (Moll, 793)” Is it wrong to imagine that they can be both at the same time? As readers, we key in on strange events, such as the castle that Gawain stays at and it’s bizarre inhabitants, and start to look at these events with a knowing eye. When it becomes apparent that things are not what they seem during the hunting/courting scenes we can almost sense that these events are laid out as a sort of trap for Gawain. One can quickly see the parallel between the brutal and sometimes graphic hunting scenes and the humorous and bawdy courtly love scenes between Gawain and Lady Bertilak. It is very clear that something supernatural-like is going on under the surface here.

***I had enough information from my secondary source to create another paragraph around it, so I did. You’ll notice that throughout these first two paragraphs I am giving the secondary sources voice privilege but I always follow up with my voice. Again, I may have written this paragraph as being towards the end of my paper originally. Once I saw that it connected with my first evidence paragraph though, I moved it back to this spot because it made logical sense. You may have to shuffle things around and add transitional sentences to make everything flow and that is okay.***

This raises another interesting point that Moll and his colleagues bring up: are we getting the English or the French version of Gawain in this tale? The inhabitants of Bertilak’s castle seem to know of Gawain when he arrives and this concept of the French lover Gawain and the English courtly love version becoming one enters into play. Again, one can speculate for ages about something like this and it makes just as much sense to say that the author was having a bit of fun by playing with the French conventions of the Gawain character. “Even the identity of the poem’s hero is open to interpretation, and many critics have remarked on the disparity between Gawain’s reputation for courtly refinements and his own self image (Moll, 793).” In the grand scheme of things none of this really matters to the heart of the story being told. It is simply another device the author is using for the readers’ entertainment.

***My voice fully comes into the paper here and you have to be careful not to reiterate all of the things that came before this. I wanted to focus on the entertainment value of the text so I wrote about the experience of reading it. I realized that my paragraph was a bit thin so I decided to think about how people would have read this text in the 14th century compared to how people (me) would read it in a modern setting. This helped me to flesh out the paragraph much more. When it doubt think about dualities you can play around with. Basically, think about other perspectives on what you are talking about. Other voices—even if they are hypothetical ones—can open up new things in your paper.***

Looking back at the opening of the story and the Green Knight’s grand entrance there seems to be a sense of foreboding and the supernatural in the air from the start. The Green Knight barges in right on cue with Arthur’s call for entertainment. He is larger than all of the men in the court and his hair is the color of green: warning bells are ringing even this early in the story. The reader knows that someone (or thing) like the Green Knight cannot exist in the real world and their minds start to see the fantastical nature of the story. This is not to say that looking at *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* from this stand point robs it of any of its pleasure; this is quite the contrary actually. The fantastic and supernatural elements are what make this story such a joy to read. The reader can be transported to another time and land where things like this could happen on a regular basis. Gawain fits the mold of the archetypal knight: he is clever, resourceful, a great fighter, and, unfortunately, full of too much pride. Someone looking at this story from a present day mindset will see this quite clearly. Obviously, one must have the ability to look back and to think what readers thought of this story when it was first written. The world view of the English people during the 14th century would have been much smaller in scope and a story like this may have conjured images of real monsters in a *very* real Camelot for them. It is difficult to take this entire story seriously, however, and therein contains the fun of reading it. Readers want their literature to whisk them away from the drudgery of their daily lives; literature is, first and foremost, a form of escapism.

***I wanted to bring back this idea of Camelot’s connection to Troy that I touched upon briefly in my introduction. If my memory serves me, I don’t think I had originally planned to write in any detail about this but I realized when reading back my introduction that I hadn’t done anything additional with that and that it fit right into my own ideas quite nicely. The moral of the story is: if you say your paper is going to be about three things, then make sure you write about those three things and not just two of them. It always helps to go back and read what you have already written. You will see things, like this example, and you it will also allow you to keep the unity of your paper throughout.***

One could also argue that connecting Camelot’s history with the legacy of Troy places the story firmly in a historical setting. “The poem opens with an elaborate Trojan introduction, beginning “*Sithen the sege and the assaut watz sesed at Troye*”, and thus establishes for the reader a historical setting… (Moll, 800)” This concept is quickly erased when the Green Knight enters the story, gets his head cut off, picks it up, and continues talking with it. Even the most inexperienced readers would see that this is neither normal nor realistic behavior for a man. We expect our fantasy stories to have elements like this in them; otherwise we would not want to read them: the concept of escapism comes into play again here. Later, Gawain’s journey over the course of the year leads him to fight all manner of beasts, even a dragon. Dragons, while sometimes misconstrued as serpents or snakes, are clearly mythical creatures that once again place Gawain in a fantasy universe.

***I didn’t really want to write this paragraph because I am egotistical and don’t like to allow other people’s thoughts into my own work. However, there is something to be said about how playing devil’s advocate works in your benefit. It allows you to really see what your standpoint is and what strengths your argument has over this stuffy old guy’s.***

In defense of the scholars, and not to take everything away from them, there is much in this story that remains reality-based. The court at Camelot is one such example. We see King Arthur presiding over his court and its various guests and nothing seems out of the ordinary. Aside from being set in medieval times and featuring some archaic dialogue we notice very little that seems fantastical. This is what makes the Green Knights’ appearance all the more startling and otherworldly. Within this normal world we have a very abnormal character introduced. The world of the natural and supernatural begin to collide here. The extended description of the Green Knight’s apparel and “accoutrements” is there to literally draw our attention to how bizarre his character seems in this particular setting.

***No one likes to write conclusions. They seem tacked on much of the time and they tend to just repeat what you have said already. That being said, I tried to look at my main focus through a method of teaching the reader something. I wanted someone who read this to think about a new method of reading a text: for enjoyment first and foremost. So in a way, I did repeat myself. I just didn’t use the same words this time and I focused my idea through the lens of teaching to give it a new perspective.***

One can pick up any work of literature and infer hundreds of things from reading it: this is a fact. No one person is going to read a piece of literature the same way and that is indeed the way it is supposed to be. What readers need to understand from the outset of reading something, especially fiction, is that the novel, story, poem, etc. is supposed to be read for entertainment firstly. There is nothing wrong with analysis afterwards but the analysis should *always* follow the initial read of the text. Reading any other way can severely damage the fun and enjoyment one can get out of reading a text like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

**Works Cited**

Moll, Richard J. “Frustrated Readers and Casual Decapitation in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”. Modern Language Review. 10 (2002). P. 793-802. Web. 24 October 2010.